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THE YOUNG MEN AND THE CHURCHES:

Why Some of Them are Outside,
and Why They Ought to Come In.

WASHINGTON GLADDEN.

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Samuel A. Eliot

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THE
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*Why Some of Them are Outside, and Why
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BY WASHINGTON GLADDEN.

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The Young Men and the Churches.

THE pastors of the churches throughout the country were requested to devote the second Sunday of November to the interests of young men. In consenting to this request, I promised to speak upon the reasons why many young men hold themselves aloof from the churches. After making this promise, it occurred to me that it would be only fair to allow the young men to state these reasons for themselves. My explanation of their conduct might not truly represent them. Accordingly I prepared the following circular-letter, which was sent, by the kind co-operation of some young gentlemen of wide acquaintance, to about two hundred representative young men in the city where I reside, some of whom are members of the churches and many of whom are not : —

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"My Dear Sir, — You know many young men in this city who seldom or never attend church, and many more who occasionally attend, but do not identify themselves with the work of the churches.

"You have heard young men of both these classes express their views on the subject. What reasons do they give for holding aloof from the churches ?

"I am very desirous of finding out how this matter lies in their minds, and I shall consider it a great favor if you will report to me, within a day or two, without mentioning the names of persons, some of the explanations given by young men of their absence from church, and their refusal to enter upon the Christian life.

"I shall regard your communication as confidential : I only wish to get at the obstacles, real or imaginary, which keep so many young men out of the churches. You can help me, and I feel confident that you will do me this great kindness.

"If you have not time to write at length,

you may state these objections or excuses in the briefest terms; but I shall be glad to read all that you are willing to write."

To this circular I received a large number of replies. The opinions of nearly fifty young men were thus reported to me; several of them at considerable length. Each letter presents from one to fifteen reasons why young men absent themselves from the churches, or decline to enter into their fellowship. Some of these reasons are many times repeated; but a careful analysis of the letters gave me no less than twenty-nine different explanations of the fact under consideration. The thorough examination of these explanations is the business now in hand. I shall not assume that they are unreasonable; I desire to note them all, to estimate them fairly, and to give to each one all the weight that belongs to it. If, after a dispassionate study, it shall seem to any young man who reads these pages that the reasons given for holding aloof from the churches are

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good and sufficient reasons, then, of course, he will stay away. If on the other hand, it shall appear to him that the good reasons are on the other side of the case, I hope he will govern himself accordingly.

Another remark should be made just here. These discussions do not proceed on the assumption that all the young men of this generation are out of sympathy with the churches. The proportion of young men in the active church membership is larger now than when I was a boy. The "young-man power" is utilized now as it did not begin to be thirty years ago. In the first year of my ministry, the number of young men in my congregation was relatively much smaller than it is to-day. This element has been steadily increasing under my eyes from year to year. During the last two years I have preached to more young men than ever before. I do not, therefore, admit that neglect of the church is increasing among young men, but I recognize the neglect that exists, and have taken this way of trying to account for it.

1. A considerable number of these reasons are presented rather jocosely than seriously, and do not weigh very heavily in the minds of those who offer them. They are not difficulties ; they are pretexts rather. One of my correspondents reports a young man as saying that his reason for not going to church is that his sweetheart does not go. But that is chaff. There is a deeper reason. One is reported as offering the excuse that the churches are cold in the winter. His spring and summer and autumn excuses are not given. I trust that the winter excuse is not a valid one. Fuel is cheap in this country, and the churches ought not to be, and I trust are not, generally, inhospitable by reason of the cold. One says that many young men feel shy in the presence of older persons. Not so shy, however, but that they manage to meet them, without much embarrassment, on the pavements, and in the stores, and on the street-cars, and at the theatres, and in the political processions. There may be young men to whom this is a real difficulty ; but they are

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very few. Lack of suitable apparel is also mentioned as a reason for the absence of some from church, but that reason, too, must operate to a limited extent. There are not many able-bodied young men in our cities who cannot readily obtain the necessary clothing. One young man is reported as saying that he avoids the church because he does not like to hear politics discussed in the pulpits: he wants to hear a good Christian sermon when he goes. This can hardly be a serious reason. Our pulpits are not, as a rule, given over to the discussion of politics. An objection exactly the reverse of this is urged by several who say that the topics of the preachers are often too remote from human life, too abstract and theological; that if they would discuss current questions and living subjects they would get a hearing. I am sure that both these classes can suit themselves, if they will try. They can find churches in which none but purely religious topics are ever introduced; and they can find churches in which Christian truth is frequently applied to the interests

of society and the state, and the affairs of every day. One young man hides behind the contribution-box. "Can't pay, so stay away," is his justification, as reported to me. But this, too, is a subterfuge. The small amount that he would feel himself required to contribute, as his share, for the support of the church, would not tax him heavily. He would not hesitate to pay this price for anything that he really valued.

2. An explanation offered by several of my correspondents of the absence of some young men from the churches is the lack of religious training in their earlier years. They were not brought up to go to church and have never formed the habit. Another explanation, the antithesis of this, is that many were compelled to go while they were young, and under this compulsion formed an aversion to the church that they have never been able to overcome. The two objections may be thought to cancel each other. If those who were brought up to go will not go, and those who were not brought up to go will not go, of course nobody will

go. Nevertheless, there may be some force in both of these excuses. The habit of church-going is not so easily formed by a mature person; most of those who attend church have done so from their childhood. Children must be trained to go. Not to have had this training is a disadvantage. Nevertheless, it is far better if the training can stop short of coercion. This is a department of household discipline, in which wisdom and tact and gentleness and loving constraint are called for, and in which the minimum of power should be used. Neither of these is, however, a reason that any sensible young man would give for not attending church. If he thinks it wise and right to go, he will go; the fact that his parents were unfaithful or overstrict with him, in his childhood, is a poor reason for not now doing the thing that is wise and right.

3. Caste is a reason given by several. One young man when questioned replied that he did not feel at home in the presence of those whom he styled "big-bugs" and "aristocrats."

I am sure that this is an utter misconception. It is possible that there may be some churches in which a poor young would not feel at home ; but there is no city in which there are not plenty of churches that are wholly free from everything that savors of caste—as free as any institution can be in which human beings enter into social relations. There are many churches in which the poor greatly outnumber the rich ; in which the “big-bugs” are in a small minority ; in which the poor men have as many rights, and as much respect, as the rich men. The young man who is afraid of caste can easily find such churches, if he wants to find them.

4. Kindred to this is the complaint of lack of attention from members of the churches. It may be that there are churches where young men are not wanted ; but it will not take any enterprising fellow very long to find a church where he is wanted ; where a warm welcome will be given him, and every assurance of interest and friendship. This excuse looks extremely attenuated to some of us who

are inside, and who know how earnestly we think and how constantly we work upon this problem of bringing the young men into our churches, and making them feel at home. Another objection is, possibly, more just. One of the young gentlemen gently complains because, although sometimes attending church, he has seen no opportunity of taking an active part in the work of the church. He has not connected himself with the church because, so far as he has been able to discover, the church has had no particular use for him. "If you want a young man, you must give him something to do," he says. That is true. I am afraid the best of us fail sometimes in this. Nevertheless, the young man who comes forward and volunteers for service will generally find something to do.

5. Certain social reasons are mentioned, not by the neglecters themselves, but by those who have been studying the question. "It is not popular among society people," writes one, "to be openly and actively identified with church work. The popular young society man is rarely

the regular and active worker in the church. Most young men are pleased, more or less, with this popularity in social circles ; and they obey society's dictates rather than the dictates of their religious duty. Society tolerates, and sometimes encourages, many things among young people that religion does not permit, and the temptation to listen to society's voice is very strong." That this is true, I fear ; and pity 't is, 't is true. The heathenism of what is called "society" is too obvious. But no sound-minded young man should submit to its domination. The one thing he must learn to do, if he would save his manhood, is to resist the demands of society. Society will lead him, if he will follow, into all sorts of extravagances and excesses ; it urges him to sacrifice his health upon its altars ; it bids him incur expenses that he can never afford ; it is an utterly reasonless and conscienceless despot, and its exactions are insatiable. Unless he can challenge its demands at every step, and hold his manhood superior to its claims, he had better keep himself wholly free from its dominion. And if its dictates are

unwise respecting so many of these matters, perhaps they are no more wise respecting the churches. At any rate, it is clear that no self-respecting young man would ever justify himself for staying away from church on the ground that church-going is not popular among society people ; he would despise himself, if he found himself acting from any such motive. Another social reason suggested by one of my correspondents is "the growth of clubs and fraternal organizations that offer a greater diversity of social, mental, and physical enjoyments than does the church." These associations may often be innocent and even useful. I have nothing to say, here, against them. And if the object of the church be only to afford a "diversity of social, mental, and physical enjoyments," then there may be good reasons for abandoning the church and joining these organizations. But if the church exist for other and higher purposes, and supplies wants that these organizations do not recognize, then this reason is altogether insufficient.

6. Two or three students frankly tell me that they stay away from church to study. They do not well. It is not necessary. I know something about student life, and I know that a student can do his work well and stand high in his classes without studying Sunday at all. No man can healthfully do the amount of work required of a successful student nowadays without keeping his Sundays for mental rest. The fact is that the law of the Sabbath is as much a natural law as the law of gravitation; it can be verified, scientifically, by experiment, in the same way that gravitation can be verified, though not with the same instruments; and he who will not obey it will suffer the consequences. If we are to have a Sunday at all, I see no reason why students should not observe it, as well as other folks. Study is their work. If there is any law of the Sabbath binding on man, their work violates it as much as that of the merchant who keeps his store open, or the blacksmith who works at his forge all day. And even if there is no legal requirement of Sabbath rest, if the day is only a dear privilege of

mental repose and spiritual refreshment, they despise the privilege and condemn the love that ordained it. They cannot afford to do it. I tell you, young gentlemen, you cannot with impunity disobey any of the divine laws. In the rough, but not irreverent, words of Hosea Biglow,

“You have got to get up airy
If you want to take in God.”

There are other and deeper wants of your natures than those which are supplied at school and college, and you must give some heed to them, if you want to be fully developed men and women. Sunday is set apart for the culture of this part of your nature, and you cannot devote it to any other uses without damage. And besides, the only way to save the day from public desecration and utter extinction is to honor it ourselves in our own private and personal use of it. We shall never enforce the Sunday laws against the saloon-keepers and the ball-players until we show more respect for Sunday by our own religious observance of it.

7. From quite a number of young men comes the complaint that the church services are too dull and the sermons too long. These objections are not made by the young men who write to me as their own objections ; they are too polite to express this as their own opinion, of course ; but they report to me, as I desired them to do, very properly and courteously, what they hear others say. "Some have frankly said to me," writes one of my correspondents, "that ministers preach too long sermons ; are too prosy ; not entertaining enough, etc." "Don't like to hear long and dry sermons and prayers," says another ; "would like to take mine in smaller amounts." Seven or eight of these young fellows offer this reason. It seems to me that this objection as to length is a little overstated. The church services, ordinarily, are not more than an hour and a half in length. Within this time there are, in our non-episcopal Protestant churches, at least ten different exercises : a voluntary on the organ, an anthem by the choir, two or three hymns by the congregation, a reading from the Bible, two or three

prayers, and the sermon. The sermon is rarely more than thirty-five minutes long, and the whole service is not more than an hour and a half in length. A concert often lasts an hour longer than that, and a theatrical performance nearly twice as long. With all the variety we introduce into the service, an hour and twenty minutes or an hour and a half ought not to be considered a great infliction, even by active and restless young men. If they were thoroughly interested in what was going on they would not feel that it was a long time. "But there's the rub," they say. "We are not interested, and you do not interest us. You are not entertaining enough." Well, I fear that we are sometimes a little prosy. But many of us do the best we can to present what we have to say in a manner as clear and interesting as the subject will admit. The subjects treated here are, however, serious subjects; they demand serious thought; to attempt to treat them always in an amusing or diverting manner would be to degrade them. The church is not a place of amusement; if it undertook to be, it would

soon lose the respect of those who raise this objection. Amusement is a good thing in its place; but there are other important interests of human life besides amusement. All earnest and useful living requires the application of thought and effort to subjects that are not easily mastered, and that grow somewhat trite before we are done with them. The student of law, of medicine, of government, finds that his studies are often wearisome; the devotee of any art must give many hours to repetitious and laborious practice. Suppose the law student should complain because the professor of constitutional law did not embellish his lectures with funny stories, and dramatic delineations, and elocutionary acrobatics. The great questions of duty and destiny deserve to be treated quite as seriously; the art of holy living can not be learned without some close and earnest study. The demand for diverting novelties from the pulpit indicates a lack of seriousness and a grave misconception of the meaning of life. Some of these letters undertake to explain this difficulty. "Many of these young

men," says one, "have loose and sometimes vicious tastes. Christian life, as they see it, would be dull, narrow, and plodding. Their tastes seek enjoyment of a different character, depending on the moral tone of the person. Church-work and church-going, to such, lack excitement, and the kind of excitement necessary to their pleasure." Another says that the reason why some of these young men find these services dull is that they have but little intellectual culture; that "they are not in the habit of using their brains." "My own opinion is," says another,—and he is not a member of the church,— "that many young people nowadays feed themselves upon such highly seasoned enjoyments, and indulge to so great an extent in exciting pleasures (as theatre-going, roller-skating, dancing, etc.), that church-going is irksome to them, and the best of sermons pall upon their pampered intellectual palates as insipid and distasteful."

Understand that I do not offer this as my own explanation of the complaint of dulness brought against the pulpit services: I report it

as an opinion expressed by two or three of my correspondents. But it is certainly true that the hour spent in church ought to be an hour not for pleasurable excitement, but for quiet and sober thinking on the greatest of themes. He who comes to church with this idea in his mind may possibly make less complaint of the dulness of its services.

8. The reason given by the largest number of those who have explained their absence from church is that they prefer to devote the time to other uses—to rest or recreation, or reading, or society. Some of them say that they are obliged to work very hard during the week, and to be up late Saturday nights; and they take their ease Sunday morning; spend the day lounging or reading, or in making excursions into the country, and devote the evening to social visiting. “Like to sleep Sunday mornings, read the papers in the afternoons, and go to see my girl Sunday night,” says one frank fellow, whose name I do not know, but whose confession I have in his own handwriting. The plea for Sunday morning for

sleep is several times repeated. I do not think it is altogether irrational, but it needs some examination. Part of this Sunday morning sleep is required, perhaps, to make up arrears of the other nights of the week, when time that ought to have been given to sleep was devoted to various owlsh occupations. If some of the young men who make this complaint were in bed all the other nights of the week at a reasonable hour, they would not be so sleepy Sunday morning. The attempt to make up the sleep of seven days upon one day in the week is a highly unphysiological proceeding. Give each day its proper amount of sleep, and you will need less on Sunday. But it is probable that most of those who make this plea are able to retire on Saturday night before twelve o'clock. If they take nine hours for sleep, — and that is all that they can wisely take at one time, — they will have two hours left for toilet and breakfast before the morning service.

But it is not merely for sleep that the day is claimed, — that claim only touches the morn-

ing service,—but for recreation and pleasure. Some like to read; the Sunday newspaper occupies the time of many; other reading, some of it more profitable doubtless, enlists the interest of some.

The chief use of the day, however, with most of those who give this reason, is recreation. "I work hard all the week, and I think I enjoy outdoor pleasure most," one is reported as saying. "I have heard a great many others," writes one, "urge, as their reason for not attending church on the Sabbath, that it was the only day they had in the week for recreation and enjoyment; that they were kept closely confined during the week, and when Sunday came they felt like having what they term 'a good time.' Many of these young men spend the whole day in the country, hunting, fishing, boating, playing ball, etc., and when winter deprives them of these outdoor amusements, they prefer to loaf around the waiting-room of some hotel, or, worse still, some 'first-class' bar-room or billiard-hall, rather than be seen at church."

“With many of the young men whom I know,” writes another, “Sunday is the ‘day off’; the only day offering opportunity for a little variety; the only day to see people; the day of rest. To sit still during a church service is not the rest they desire.” “Many,” writes another, “who are busily occupied during the remainder of the week, seek on Sunday to indulge in rest and recreation in a way most satisfactory to themselves, and are naturally disinclined to spend the heart of the day in church, listening to the denunciation of their weaknesses and frailties, and their concomitant penalty of eternal damnation.” Softly, good sir! Are you not letting your rhetoric run away with you now? Is that, indeed, the staple of what young men would hear if they went to church nowadays? Very little of that sort of thing, I imagine. “Denunciation of their weaknesses and frailties?” O, no: I do not think we are apt to put it in that way. If we point out their errors and warn them of their perils, I am sure that we do it with the sincerest love for them, and

with no tone of bitterness or denunciation. But this is only a slip of the pen ; the real point made is that many young men prefer to spend Sunday in various diversions ; they do not wish to devote the time to church attendance and worship. The need of recreation for men who work hard all the week — especially of outdoor recreation for those whose pursuits are sedentary — I heartily allow. And I trust the day is coming when one afternoon or part of an afternoon in every week will be devoted, in this country as in England, to such purposes. The business interests of the country would not suffer in the least from this innovation. The bane of our industry is overproduction. Most of our manufacturing establishments make so much more than they can sell that they are obliged to close up for long periods. This is the natural and inevitable effect of the employment of so much machinery. It would be vastly better for business, better for the health and morals of the people, if this idle time could be distributed evenly over the year,

giving weekly space for recreation. But even if this result should not be reached at present, it will still remain a serious question whether the choice made by these young men is a wise choice. That their bodies need refreshment and their minds recreation, I allow ; but would it not be possible to obtain all of these that are necessary and yet save the religious use of Sunday ? It all comes back to this question, —and we shall be driven back to it, again and yet again, —whether we have not other and higher interests than recreation ; whether Sunday is not the time for attending to these interests ; whether we may not gain, by a religious use of Sunday, greater benefits than we obtain by this merely recreative and festal use of it.

I recall a little experience of my own, which has always influenced my judgment in this matter. For a time, in my young manhood, I devoted my Sundays to such uses as these young men describe. I had long been required to attend church ; I found myself in a large village, master of my own time and

movements, and I concluded that I had had church enough to last me for some time ; that I would try giving Sunday to rest and recreation. This continued, perhaps, four or five months, and it is the simple fact that these were the dullest and dreariest Sundays that I ever spent. They are the days of my life of which I can most truthfully say, I had no pleasure in them. And I greatly doubt whether the young men of this city, especially those who were reared in Christian households, who are now turning their backs on the churches and spending their Sundays according to the plan we are considering, are really having a good time after all. I do not believe that rumination upon these Sunday hours and occupations leaves a pleasant taste in the mouth. Even if no vice or excess mar the reflection, there is an uneasy feeling that there were higher uses to which the time ought to have been put.

9. One young man, when inquired of, explained his absence from church by saying that, although he had lived in Columbus for two

years, no one had invited him to go. This neglect is censurable; if, as he says, his associates during this time have been church-going people, they are inexcusable for neglecting to give him a special and personal invitation. But I think he is somewhat in error when he says that he has never been invited. Has he not heard the church-bells ring every Sunday? What do they signify? Has he not read every Saturday the daily newspapers? In them he must see the announcements of the Sunday services, followed in most cases by such statements as these: "The public is cordially invited." "All are invited." These notices are printed by the churches in the newspapers, often at considerable cost, for the especial benefit of persons like the complainant. And when we thus send forth our proclamations, and ring our bells, and open our doors, and station our politest young men near them, to greet everybody who comes, and show him a seat, I submit that it is a little less than gracious for any man to say that he has not been invited.

10. A reason suggested by one of my correspondents for the absence of young men from the churches may best be stated in his own vigorous words: "In every church, so far as my observation has gone, there exists a coterie (and I say 'exists,' advisedly, for it does not live) solely for the purpose of driving young men to desperation whenever they get on the right road." Their method of doing this, as my friend illustrates, is the method of a carping and unsympathetic criticism; they are too ready to pick flaws in the conduct of young men; to regard many of their youthful pranks as mortal sins, and their boyish tastes as clear evidence of an unsanctified heart. That such morose and exasperating censors of youth are sometimes found in churches is true; and some have been driven away from the churches by this cause; but there is far less of this than formerly; many churches can be found in which such difficulties scarcely exist. Ill-natured and meddlesome criticism is apt to be encountered everywhere; the churches are not the only places in which it finds expression; but the

manly, good-natured, and self-respecting young man need not be greatly troubled by it, whether in the church or out of it.

II. Another class of absentees is thus described : " Many young men, in times of universal religious excitement, impelled solely by the emotions and impulses of the hour, profess changes of sentiment and character which in the nature of things could not take place. When the excitement is over they discover their mistake ; and, though often continuing the forms of religion for some time, at last give up these, and a sense of shame keeps them thereafter from the church." The existence of this class of persons, old and young, in the community is a phenomenon that I have not overlooked. To my mind it is one of the saddest features of current religious history. But to all such victims of false theory in religion I would say : The fact that you mistook an emotional excitation for the religious life does not prove that there is no such thing as the religious life. If you and several others should start for Cincinnati by the wrong road, and after

traveling together for some time should fail to arrive at that place, your experience would not prove that there was no such place as Cincinnati, nor that it was impossible or undesirable to go thither. The man who has imbibed the idea that religion consists of pleasurable emotions and magical changes may well rid himself of that idea and endeavor to obtain a more rational and practical one ; but he is no more justified by his mistake in rejecting religion altogether, than the man who had tried to live on whipped syllabub and had not been nourished by it would be justified in refusing all kinds of food.

12. One gentleman gives it as his judgment that the reason of the failure of many to connect themselves with the churches is a certain natural reticence of many minds with respect to the expression of religious thought and feeling. They think that such expressions are expected of all church members — males at any rate ; that the failure “to offer public prayer, or relate personal religious experience in public,” would be regarded as an evidence of a want of piety ;

and they therefore hold themselves aloof from the church. To this objection I should say, to begin with, that no church ought to exact any such public performance as a condition of membership. Whatever is done in this way ought to be done out of a willing heart. In the second place, the relation of one's "personal experience" is not by any means the only contribution that one can make to the interest of a social meeting. There are many truths of religion, and many subjects in which the church is interested, upon which one can freely express himself, without any violation of his natural reticence respecting his own spiritual state. And the conferences of Christians, about the truths in which they are interested and the work in which they are engaged, ought to be so free and informal that no man or woman who has any thoughts should find any difficulty in uttering them. But it will not be hard for any young man seeking religious associations to find a church in which the taking part in public services of this nature will neither be denied him nor demanded of him; in which the privi-

lege will be offered him of speaking when he has anything to say, and of keeping silent when he has nothing to say. That the difficulty we are here considering may be a serious one to some minds is possible; but if the number of these, were very large we should see the young men deserting those churches where the members sometimes do take part in conference and prayer and thronging the churches where they never do. The movement of young men in this direction is not, in my observation, so general as to indicate that the objection in their minds is one of great importance.

13. One of my correspondents queries whether some of our young men are not outside the fellowship of the church because we have thrust them out by our inadequate theories respecting the church membership of the children of Christian parents. They ought to be trained from their earliest years, he thinks, to regard themselves as members of the household of Christ. "Every impulse of the little one for good," he says, "is the act of the great, warm heart of the eternal Father, drawing the child

to himself. Every decision of its mind for right against wrong is in the work of its salvation, its conversion, its turning to God." After years of such experience, under Christian training, the boy finds that he is outside the church, and that something — exactly what, he does not know — must be done to get inside. My friend thinks, and I agree with him, that this is a bad method; that our Christian nurture ought to keep the children in the church, instead of first pushing them out, and then bringing them back.

14. Quite a number of these letters explain the absence of many young men from church as due to a belief entertained by them that the Christian life is unmanly. "A conviction that church-going is an indication of effeminacy and childishness" is the reason suggested by one. "Some are under the false impression," says another, "that it is womanish to attend church. Possibly," he adds, "these persons base their opinion on the fact that more women than men attend church, but that is also true of literary and musical entertainments of a high order. It has been very noticeable to me that young men

are in a decided minority at these gatherings." This cannot be, of course, because literature or art are peculiarly womanish. The opinion that the Christian life is in any sense unmanly is about as wide of the mark as opinion can go. A genuine Christianity neglects no element of the highest manhood, rejects no pleasure that is really manly, offers the fullest scope to every manly ambition. It is that which is beastly in us that Christianity seeks to check and exterminate, not that which is manly. Many of these young men are turning away from the Christian life, as I am told, because they think that Christianity will rob them of their pleasures. There are many diversions and enjoyments that they think harmless, that they suppose they would be obliged to abandon if they entered upon the Christian life. To this it is enough to say that Christian discipleship does not involve the abandonment of any innocent enjoyment. Any diversion that you can use in such a way as to receive pleasure and benefit from it yourself, and do no harm to others, you are perfectly entitled to use, if you

are a Christian; and any diversion that you cannot use without receiving injury for yourself, or doing harm to others, you have no right to use whether you are a Christian or not.

But it is to be feared that some of those who urge this objection are addicted to pleasures and practices that they know are wrong. The reason why they stay away from the churches is obvious enough. Their hearts are fully set in them to do evil. They are living a kind of life that their own consciences disapprove; and they are stifling their consciences, and giving loose reign to their appetites or their selfish desires. Now the last place to which a man who is living this kind of life wants to go is the church. He knows that the conscience which he is trying to silence will be up in arms if he goes there; that Scripture and song and sermon will all put scourges into the hand of conscience to torment him withal, and he consults his own comfort by staying away. I am bound to admit that the man who is bent on doing wrong has a very natural and cogent reason—not a good reason—for not wanting to attend church, and

it is to be feared that the absence of many must be explained in this way. There are those, as one of my correspondents testifies, who "seem to think that so much experience in the darker phases of life is necessary to a perfect manhood; that they must see sin in all its forms and various stages before they are fitted to be strong and valiant men." While they are going through this process the house of God is not a welcome resort to them. For the young man who talks in that way does not deceive himself. He knows that the slime of the pit is over all that slippery logic. He knows that he is not ministering to a perfect manhood by any such brutal indulgences. He knows that he is lying to his own soul, and he does not like to go where the lie will be flung back in his teeth. The reason of the absence of some of our young men from the churches is quite too obvious.

15. A large number of those who stay away from church justify themselves for doing so on the ground of the inconsistency or hypocrisy of the members of the church. One of my correspondents, reciting the reasons that he hears

young men give for holding aloof from the churches, mentions "a belief that many ministers do not believe what they preach," and another quotes as a current saying that "ministers are hypocrites." To those who make this latter sweeping accusation I can offer no reply except to ask whether it is not a rather harsh judgment, and whether their acquaintance with ministers has been extensive and intimate enough to warrant such a wholesale condemnation. To those who think that *many* ministers do not believe what they preach, I answer that this is a good reason for refusing to listen to ministers of this class. If you have sufficient grounds for the belief that any minister is a hypocrite and a deceiver of the people, hear not him! But the belief that *many* are false seems to imply that *some* are true. And the question before us is not why you refuse to hear the false ones: that needs no explanation; it is why you refuse to hear the true ones. There are many grocers, probably, in your city who sell chicory for coffee, and oleomargerine for butter; but there are some, no doubt, who sell the genuine

Java and the pure butter. Do you refuse to buy of the honest grocer because the dishonest grocer cheats you? There must be some religious teachers in your vicinity who honestly endeavor to find the truth on these great themes, and to tell it. Why do you not seek them out and hearken to their words?

But it is not the ministers alone who are thus severely judged. The members of the churches are exposed to the same censure. "Others think that many church members are hypocrites," writes one of my friends. "Lack of faith in religious young men" is a reason adduced by another. "There are many," writes another, "who point to some weak brother in the church who has made some mistake or committed some sin, and excuse themselves by saying, 'I am as good as he.'" This is the tenor of many of the explanations given. If you should ask these objectors to give you the facts on which they base their judgment, you would find, in the majority of cases, that it is the dishonesty or uncharity of some one or some few persons that has led them to turn

their backs on the churches. "Ab uno disce omnes"—judge all by one—is the rule that they are all the while applying, and it is about as false and mischievous a maxim, when used of human beings, as was ever invented. The injustice and unreason of condemning the whole church because a few persons in it behave badly is so flagrant that he who resorts to it scarcely deserves our patience.

But some of those whose reasons are reported to me boldly say that there is no difference between the people of the churches and the people outside the churches. "A very earnest and sincere young man" is reported as saying that "when he looked about him he saw very little difference in respect to practical everyday righteousness between the church member and the non-church-member." So, for substance, say several. And one young man is reported as going a little further and declaring: "My reason is that in twenty years' dealing with Christians I have not found them as honest as non-professors." It is very strange that intelligent people should talk in this way.

We all freely admit, and sadly deplore, the inconsistencies of many church members. None of us is perfect; and we see many round about us whose conduct often dishonors their profession. And we are ready to own that there are many persons outside the church who are as good in every respect as many that are within the church, and better far than some. But to say that, taking church members as a class and non-church-members as a class, the one class is morally no better than the other, is to make a statement utterly at war with the most obvious facts. Here are a few simple tests that it is easy to apply: Are there as many church members as non-church-members in the penitentiaries? Are there as many church members as non-church-members among the persons arraigned day by day in the police-courts? Are there as many church members as non-church-members among the saloon-keepers and the gamblers and the prostitutes of the cities? Were there, think you, as many church members as non-church-members in the Cincinnati mob? Taking the disorderly, the vicious, the

dangerous classes of the country together, do you think there are as many church members as non-church-members among them? I will not insult you by offering you figures; I simply ask you what your own opinion is. On the other hand, take any representative body of men and women whose purpose is purely unselfish and philanthropic—such a body as the Prison Reform Association, or the Charities Aid Association of New York—and what would the proportion be? These are not religious organizations: their object is wholly humanitarian and patriotic; and yet you will find that a large majority of the men and women at work in them are members of the churches. Take the relief society of your town or city, the society that cares for the poor; it is not in any sense religious, but what proportion of its active members are members of the churches? Putting aside all the foreign missionary work, if you insist, as fanatical and quixotic—the great bulk of all the benevolent work of our towns and cities, the hand-to-hand work with the heathen at home, is done by the members of

our churches. There are excellent, charitable people outside the churches ; I do not overlook or disparage their goodness ; but the fact remains as I have stated it. And when any attempt is made to secure an improvement of public morals, or an enforcement of the laws, will you find the church members or the non-church-members enlisting in stronger force? Take a movement like the Citizens' League of Chicago, or the Law and Order League of Boston, — whose main purpose is the prevention of the sale of liquor to minors, — in what proportion do you find church members and non-church-members among its active promoters? In short, whenever any call is made upon the intelligence, the integrity, the moral courage, the philanthropy, of the community, the great majority of the volunteers always come from the churches ; and whenever any disorderly and destructive work is to be done in society, the great majority of the disturbers and destroyers always come from the ranks of the non-church-goers. I am not saying that most non-church-goers are criminals, but that most criminals are

non-churchgoers. I do not affirm that all churchgoers are philanthropists, but that most philanthropists are churchgoers. There are many unworthy people in the churches, and must be; there are many worthy people outside the churches; but to compare the two classes, and say that there is no difference between them, — that the average integrity and purity and charity of the people inside the churches is no better than that of the people outside, — is to manifest a deplorable ignorance or a pitiful bigotry. It is a common saying; but I trust the young men who read these pages will value their own reputation for good judgment too highly to repeat it. And he who gives this as the reason for refusing to attend church shows about as much sense as the man who should refuse the daily ablution in water, on the alleged ground that those who bathe are no cleanlier than those who do not.

16. I come now to a class of objections which are radical in this respect, that they strike at the roots of faith. If they are valid, our churches are seminaries of ignorance and super-

stition, and you ought not only to refuse to attend them, but to join Mr. Ingersoll in the crusade which he is preaching for their extinction.

These objections, in their crudest form, are presented by some who offer very few reasons for their rejection of Christian truth, but who put it aside with the air of the bravado, as one of my correspondents expresses it, with a simply contemptuous sneer at it, as unworthy of their attention. That "infidelity shows independence," and that "Ingersollism is manly," are put down in one of these letters as two articles in the creed of a class of young men with whom he meets. Another describes the same class as those who "think it the thing to be sceptical, you know." "Don't believe in the doctrine," answers one for himself. "Don't believe in the whole plan, and think the whole thing a sell," replies another. To this class of objectors there is not much to say, except that it is hard to understand why it should be thought manly to reject a religion whose main purpose is to help us in keeping the body under,

in speaking the thing that is true, and in doing to others as we would have them do to us. The fellow who is getting away from this sort of thing is not, probably, growing manly. He is more likely to be growing brutish or devilish. One of my correspondents, a close observer, speaking of those who have "drifted into a kind of life that finds its chief enjoyment in frequenting saloons and other haunts of vice," says that they "are antagonistic in a remarkable degree to religion, and to people who profess Christianity; the very name of Christ and mention of his church and work causes them to sneer and scoff."

But I am far from wishing to insinuate that all those who are inclined to reject Christianity manifest this unreasoning temper, or make their doubt the screen of their depravity. There are hypocrites in the church, who cloak their iniquity under their belief; and there are hypocrites outside the church who make their unbelief a cover for their iniquity. Neither of these classes is entitled to any respect. But there are also honest believers within the church,

and honest unbelievers without, and it is with these last that we have now to do.

One of my correspondents, in giving the reasons why some young men absent themselves from the churches, mentions "an impression," entertained by some, "that a religion, or code of spiritual faith, founded by shepherds and fishermen in a semi-barbarous province of Rome, twenty centuries ago, that was not thought worth mentioning in the history of those times, and that failed to make any impression on the civilization of the world then, is hardly suitable for the civilization of the young American of the latter half of the nineteenth century." My correspondent very properly describes this as "an impression"; he might have added that it is a very unsubstantial and erroneous impression. It begs the whole question at the start, as to the founding of Christianity; the assertion that it was founded by shepherds and fishermen is not an indisputable fact. Moreover, the notion about the early insignificance of Christianity betrays a vast misconception. That the beginnings of Christianity were

humble and noiseless is most true ; so it is with all life, and the noblest growths are generally the feeblest in their beginnings. The founder of Christianity predicted its course in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. But no historical movement is more clearly marked than the sure and steady progress of the Christian faith from the time of the death of Christ. Its missionaries went forth, sprinkling Western Asia with little groups of confessors ; lifting up the Christian standards in every great centre of learning or commerce ; unfurling the banner of the cross on the Acropolis at Athens, and in the marts of Corinth and Ephesus and Thessalonica ; gaining speedily a firm foothold for their faith in the Eternal City. Within three centuries from the death of Christ Rome itself was under the sway of His religion. The historian Gibbon was no friend of Christianity, yet he devotes a famous chapter to its progress and establishment in the Roman Empire : "an inquiry," as he says, which "may be considered *a very essential part of the history of that empire.*" "While that great body," I am now quoting

Gibbon, "was invaded by open violence, or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigor from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the cross on the ruins of the Capitol." * There is the fact; it is a tremendous fact. That Christianity should have pushed itself in so short a time into the centre of the world's civilization, and taken possession of it; that it should have grappled with the philosophy and the heathenism of the empire, and proved itself more than a match for both; that it should have fought the gladiatorial shows and conquered them; that it should have practically put an end to the exposure of infants and many other age-long barbarisms; that it should have traveled swiftly west through Europe and spread itself over Gaul and Hispania, and even Britain, at this early day, shows a system not lacking in vigor, not altogether insignificant as a historical force.

Let me bring you another witness. Ernest

* *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. i, chap. xv, p. 504.

Renan is a sceptical writer, well berated in orthodox pulpits. You cannot suspect him of any bias in favor of Christianity; but Ernest Renan is a student of history, and this is what he says:—

“In the midst of the enormous ferment in which the Jewish nation was plunged under the last Asmoneans, there took place in Galilee the most wonderful moral event which history has ever recorded. A matchless man—so grand, that, although here all must be judged from a purely scientific point of view, I would not gainsay those who, struck with the exceptional character of his work, call him God—effected a reform in Judaism: a reform so radical, so thorough, that it was in all respects a complete creation. . . . Jesus [not shepherds and fishermen] founded the eternal religion of humanity, the religion of the soul, stripped of everything sacerdotal, of creed, of external ceremonies, accessible to every race, superior to all castes, in a word absolute. The vital centre was established to which humanity must for centuries refer its hopes, its consolations, its motives for

well-doing. The most copious source of virtue that the sympathetic touch of a sublime conscience ever caused to well up in the heart of a man was opened. The lofty thought of Jesus, hardly comprehended by his disciples, suffered many lapses. . . . Christianity, notwithstanding, prevailed from the first, and prevailed supremely over other existing religions." * I could extend this quotation, but this will suffice. Is it not a sufficient answer to the objection we are considering? Our objector thinks that the advent of the Christian religion was an obscure and insignificant fact. Renan says it was "the most wonderful moral event which history has recorded." Our objector thinks it made no impression on the world. Renan declares that it "prevailed from the very first, and prevailed supremely over other existing religions." Will you let me say to you, young gentlemen, that if you will study faithfully the history of the origin and growth of the Christian religion, you will very quickly get rid of the impression that it was ever a contemptible factor in the world's

* *Religious History and Criticism*, p. 161.

life; and you will see some reasons for believing that even "the young American of the latter half of the nineteenth century" can well afford to treat it with entire respect.

"There is a class," writes one of my most valued correspondents, "a growing class of young men who hold aloof from the churches because they cannot conscientiously indorse their fundamental ideas, or subscribe to much of their teachings. This class comprises our most earnest and intellectual young men. It is not through carelessness or indifference that these young men are not professors of what the world calls religion, and have little or no sympathy with much that passes under that name. As a rule, they are those who have thoughtfully, earnestly, reverently studied the problem of life. They are sceptical regarding old traditions, creeds, doctrines, formulas, but they are not sceptical regarding truth and virtue. Among this class of young men I find the brightest examples of strict integrity and untarnished purity in thought, word, and deed."

I accept this description as substantially

accurate, except that I would say: "This class comprises *some of* our most earnest and intellectual young men." I do not think that all the young men possessing these qualities belong in this class.

Of the same tenor is another long and very interesting letter, in which the writer, who does not sign his name, gives me a full and vivid, but rather sad, account of his own religious history. "Between the lines," he writes, "you will notice that doubt and disbelief in religious doctrines are the chief causes for my non-attendance upon church. What I have said will show that lack of faith, such as is necessary for conscientious and true Christianity, is the great underlying cause, upon which are piled indifference, inertia, inaction."

To such young men as these I have no words of complaint or criticism to speak. Of course either they are woefully mistaken, or I am, respecting this Christian faith. They may have studied these questions as candidly as I have; they may be just as honest in their conclusions as I am in mine. That I shall assume.

But, inasmuch as they have frankly opened their hearts to me, I will offer them a suggestion or two, which I am sure they will receive in all kindness.

First. Do not too hastily conclude that this Christian faith is an effete superstition. I trust I have given you some reasons for believing that it was in the beginning, and is now, a great power in the world. It is worthy of your study.

Second. Study it broadly, historically, as a great world-fact. Too many people begin with a logical analysis of particular doctrines. That is like studying astronomy with a microscope or measuring the ocean with a thimble. You never can comprehend what Christianity is till you trace its course through the centuries, till you mark its outline on the map of the world, till you try to estimate the influences that have sprung from its life in the literature and laws and institutions of Christendom.

Third. Beware — may I say it? — of bigotry. For then there is a bigotry of unbelief that is quite as common as the bigotry of faith, and not a bit lovelier.

Fourth. Be careful lest you identify Christianity with what is no part of Christianity, and reject it because of outworn garments of philosophy which it once wore, but has now cast off. There has been steady progress in Christian philosophy from the earliest days ; the forms of statement change greatly from age to age ; and it is quite possible that the ideas over which you stumble are not Christian ideas at all.

Fifth. Is it not possible for you to find some body of Christian people, between whom and yourself there may be many points of sympathy ? and to unite with them in so much of their work as you conscientiously approve ? You believe, I trust, that the main object of these churches is a good one. You do not doubt that they are honestly trying to promote goodness in the world. You do not believe all that some of them do ; but are not your agreements with them, after all, more numerous and more fundamental than your disagreements ? and may you not receive some benefit for yourself, and give them some aid also, by ignoring your differences and walking with them as far as

you are agreed? Some of you stay away from the churches and maintain toward them a rather unsympathetic, if not unfriendly, attitude because you do not agree with them in certain points of belief. If we gave you the cold shoulder because you do not believe some things that we believe, you would call it bigotry, would you not? If you give us the cold shoulder for exactly the same reason, what shall we call it? There is no need of any doubtful disputations between us; but we shall all be better if we magnify our agreements and put aside our differences, and join heartily in working along the lines that are common to us — in building up in the world the kingdom of righteousness and peace.

17. Thus far our argument has been mainly negative. We have been trying to show that the reasons given for staying away from church are not good reasons. But there is a class that is not yet reached. Quite a number of these letters make answer that in many cases the reason is simple indifference, or indifference coupled with habit. These young men have

formed the habit of staying at home; having formed the habit, they have come to regard the whole matter with indifference. And with some of them there is not only a lack of interest, but a doubt as to the utility of the practice. "*Cui bono?*" some of them ask. What is the good of going to church, anyway? What benefits should I derive from the service if I should go? This is the point to which I now wish to speak.

First. It is a good thing to go to church regularly every Sunday as a mere drill in external decencies and proprieties. To make yourself clean and presentable, to walk quietly to the place of worship and sit decorously and attentively through the service, is, to many of you, a good exercise. One of the things this noisy, bustling generation most needs to learn is how to be quiet. And about the only chance that a good many have of learning it is the hour or two a week that they spend in church.

Second. The service, if orderly and beautiful, as it should be, should afford to a refined taste some pleasure. There is no purer English,

no nobler rhetoric than that which you will hear when the Bible is read ; the hymns of the church are full of lofty poetry ; and the grandest music always has been, and always will be, church music.

Third. To identify yourself with the best people in the community, and to spend an hour or two every week in their company, will increase your self-respect, and benefit you in many ways.

Fourth. The intellectual stimulus is not to be despised. I will not venture on any statement of my own respecting this matter ; let me quote what Dr. Holland says in one of his "Letters to the Joneses." He is talking to a mechanic about church-going. "I tell you that if you suppose the American pulpit to be contemptible, you are very much mistaken. You have stayed away from it for ten years. During all these ten years I have attended upon its ministrations, and I have a better right than you have to speak about it, because I know more about it. I tell you that I have received, during these ten years, more intellect-

ual nourishment and stimulus from the pulpit than from all other sources combined ; yet my every-day pursuits are literary, while yours are not."

Fifth. But these are superficial reasons. The real reason for going to church is that you are a moral and spiritual being, and that the church offers you an opportunity for the nurture and training of your moral and spiritual faculties.

You are a moral being. You distinguish between right and wrong ; between veracity and falsehood ; between purity and impurity ; between honesty and dishonesty ; between self-control and self-indulgence ; between cruelty and kindness ; between avarice and benevolence. You know that you ought always to choose and follow the right, yet you often find yourself weak in the presence of temptation to do wrong. You know, too, that one of your deepest needs is to have your moral sense quickened and your moral vigor increased. Through your every-day contact with men this need is not supplied. Instead of having your

conscience educated and directed by your daily associations, you often discover that it is being sophisticated and perverted. The effect of the life in which you mingle is to lower your standards and break down your principles. To preserve your moral nature from detriment and spoliation, and to keep it sound and whole, you need often to surround yourself with the atmosphere of a high morality, an ideal morality; to go where the perfect standard will be lifted up, and your noblest sentiments and impulses will be aroused, and the shining heights of purity and integrity will attract your vision. And that will be done for you, more or less perfectly, by the services of the church—by the Scriptures that are read, by the hymns that are sung, by the prayers that are offered, by the sermon that is preached. Whatever else you may say of the church and its services, the things that men are led to think of at church are the things that are honorable, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report. And, whoever you are, and whatever the manner of your daily life may

be, I know that you need to think of these things, and to gain strength by thinking of them for a pure and manly life.

But you are a spiritual being, as well as a moral being. By this I mean that you have a religious nature ; that you are made, not only to think true thoughts and do right deeds, but to adore and worship God. This religious nature of yours is the noblest part of you. It is what makes you a man. Like every other part of your nature, it needs its proper nutriment. Just as your body must have food, just as your mind must have truth, just as your social affections must have love, so your religious nature must have communion with God. Or, to put it in the terms of science, as Professor Drummond has so strikingly done in his "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," a man lives by correspondence with his environment. His body lives by entering into vital relations with the physical world. If there were no solid earth for it to rest on, no air for it to breathe, no food for it to eat, it could not exist. His mind, likewise, lives by entering into vital

relations with the world of truth. A knower implies something knowable. If there were nothing to know, the thinking principle would collapse and vanish. His social nature, also, enters into living relations with his kind. A lover implies some one to love. The affections would shrivel and decay if there were not human hearts to receive and return their largess. In all these cases one of these correlatives implies the other. The lungs imply air; the digestive apparatus implies food; the intelligence implies knowledge; the affections imply objects of affection. Well now go on with the argument. That you are a religious being by nature is just exactly as plain as that you are a physical being, or an intellectual being, or a social being. Worship, adoration, prayer, are facts of the human nature precisely as certain as digestion or filial love. Has this part of your nature no correlative? Do your religious faculties exist without an environment? That is scientifically absurd and impossible. Just as the lungs imply air, just as the knower implies a knowable, just as the lover implies beings to

be loved, so the worshiper implies an Object of worship. And just as all these other parts of our nature only thrive when they are kept in close and vital correspondence with their environment, so the religious nature only thrives when it is kept in close and vital correspondence with its environment, which is God.

This argument, drawn from the principle of correlation, for the existence of an object of worship, is to my mind conclusive. But if you want any confirmation of this truth, let me give it to you in the words of the great philosopher of evolution, Mr. Herbert Spencer. In an article published only four months ago,* Mr. Spencer has expressed himself with reference to the existence of this Object of worship in language almost startling in its clearness and vigor. It is true that he insists that we can have no knowledge of the mode of the divine existence; the Power behind phenomenon is incomprehensible to our thought; the language which men apply to Him is, in Spencer's view, often extravagant and absurd. Nevertheless,

* Popular Science Monthly, August, 1884.

that there is behind all the forces of nature a Power from which they all proceed, and on which they all depend, is, he says, the most certain of all facts. Let me give you his words: "While the Power which transcends phenomena cannot be brought within the forms of our finite thought, yet, as being a necessary datum of every thought, belief in its existence has among our beliefs the highest validity of any." And again: "Though the nature of the Reality transcending appearances cannot be known, yet its existence is necessarily implied by all we do know. Though no conception of this Reality can be framed by us, yet an indestructible consciousness of it is the very basis of our intelligence." And still again: "I held at the outset, and continue to hold, that the Inscrutable Existence which science, in the last resort, is compelled to recognize as unreached by its deepest analysis of matter, motion, thought, and feeling, stands toward our general conception of things in substantially the same relation as does the Creative Power asserted by theology." And yet once

more: "When implying that the Infinite and Eternal Energy, manifested alike within us and without us, and to which we must ascribe not only the manifestations themselves, but the law of their order, will hereafter continue to be, under its transfigured form, an object of religious sentiment, I have implied that whatever components of this sentiment disappear there must ever survive those which are appropriate to the consciousness of a Mystery that cannot be fathomed, and a Power that is omnipresent." That is the very last word of the evolutionist philosophy, from the lips of its greatest teacher. Mr. Spencer leaves much unsaid that some of us would say. There are ways of knowing about the Power of which he speaks that he does not recognize; nevertheless, if what he says is true, then it is plain that the religious nature of man is not without its proper environment; that the faith faculty has its correlative; that worship is natural to man, and that it is the most sublimely rational act that a human being can perform. The house of worship is, then, the place to which a rational human

being would naturally betake himself. When he goes thither he follows one of the noblest impulses of his nature. When he studies reverently the great problems of his spiritual life he is engaged in the highest pursuit that can occupy his mind, and when he lifts up his thought and his desire in adoration and supplication to that Infinite and Eternal Power, from whom his life and all other life proceeds, he is seeking for the supply of the deepest want of his being.

But some may say: "We recognize the need of worship, but we prefer to worship by ourselves." It is true that there are certain acts of worship that can be performed in solitude; the devout soul can find God anywhere; but it is not less true that the highest benefits of worship are gained through the commingling of our prayers and our praises in social worship. Our sympathy with men and our reverence for God must always be interfused and blended; we cannot part them without distorting both. "As no class can separate its fortunes from the fortunes of the community," says President

Bascom, "neither can any man long maintain in a felicitous form any spiritual feelings which are not shared by those about him." * And he who wishes to strengthen his moral power, and to stimulate and arouse his religious faculties, cannot wisely refuse to lay hold of such helps as he can gain by joining in study and in worship with those who are seeking the same things.

"Oh, sweeter than the marriage feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company.

"To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to His great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay."

This is the end of the argument, young gentlemen. I could not pay you so sorry a compliment as to assume that you were unwilling to go into the matter thoroughly, and to think it out, man-fashion. That these reasonings

* *The Words of Christ*, p. 89.

will have much weight with those whose main purpose in life is amusement, I do not expect ; but I have hoped to convince those who are capable of serious thought, and who want to live wisely and worthily, that the practice of churchgoing is grounded in reason and justified by experience ; and that no petty conceit of culture, and no plea of indolence or negligent habit or love of fun, can justify them from staying away from the house of God on the Lord's day. And I will trust that more than one young man who reads these pages, after turning the whole matter over in his mind, will come to terms with his conscience after some such manner as this : —

“Yes, it is all true. Rest I need, and recreation I need, and I will get them as I can. But I need also to preserve and enlarge and ennoble my character. There are faculties and powers of my nature that are but scantily exercised or cultivated in my daily work, and these are the royal faculties of my nature. I want to give them a little chance for development. And Sunday is the time and the

church is the place for the care of these higher interests. I will go to the church, and I will unite as heartily as I can in its services. I will not hide myself in a corner, and slink down in my seat, and button myself up in suspicion and unsympathy; doubtless, if I take that attitude, I shall get but little benefit. But I will go in and sit down with the rest, as if I were not ashamed to be one of them; and I will open my mind and my heart to all the good influences; I will join in the singing; I will listen attentively and reverently to prayer, and Scripture, and sermon; I will be ready to welcome and rejoice in everything that ministers to my higher nature—to my moral and spiritual faculties. Some things may be read or said that I cannot understand; I will put them one side for further thought. Some doctrines may be preached that do not commend themselves to my reason; I will not puzzle over these; I will listen for the words that are true to me, that find me, that show me my faults, and tell me how to mend them, that make plainer to me the way of integrity

and purity, that touch my higher feelings and kindle my nobler aspirations, that arouse my hatred for all that is false and mean, and lift up before me worthier standards of living, and clear for me the path that leads into the presence of the Infinite Love, who is my Father in heaven. I know that if, in this spirit, I join in these services, I shall find in them something that will enable me to be a better and a happier man, and that I am going to find, whatever else I miss."

One young gentleman bears the following testimony, and it may help to confirm any such conclusion to which you may have come : —

"I am personally acquainted with a number of young men who may be classed as occasional churchgoers — that is, young men who occasionally 'drop in,' sometimes at one church and sometimes at another. In fact, I have been a member of this class myself. How I came to be would be a question difficult to answer. In truth, the causes are so few and small that, even could I enumerate them, I am certain that I should be ashamed of them. But suffice it to

say that I have recently joined the 'regulars,' and if I am not a better young man for having done so, I have certainly absorbed some of the moral influence which exists in the churches; and my friends among the 'occasionals,' have only to try it to feel and know that it pays."

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